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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PRISTINA 000948

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DEPT FOR DRL, INL, AND EUR/SCE, NSC FOR BRAUN, USUN FOR
DREW SCHUFLETOWSKI, USOSCE FOR STEVE STEGER

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TAGS: [PREF](#) [EAID](#) [PREL](#) [UNMIK](#) [YI](#)

SUBJECT: KOSOVO: PLANNING FOR POSSIBLE SERB REFUGEE
MOVEMENTS POST-STATUS SHOWS GAPS IN ABILITY TO HANDLE LARGE
MIGRATIONS

Classified By: COM TINA KAIDANOW FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Since the leak to Serbian media in May 2006 of UNHCR's draft contingency planning on possible population movements after a decision on Kosovo's final status, UNHCR has continued to refine its thinking. Planning assumptions vary wildly, with estimates ranging from 10,000 to 112,000 additionally displaced people (i.e., above and beyond those already displaced after the Kosovo conflict and March 2004 riots), depending on whether the decision is accompanied by violence as in March 2004. UNHCR has pre-positioned small amounts of humanitarian assistance in Kosovo, but warns that funding will be needed and additional aid providers like the World Food Program will have to get involved depending on the scale of population movements. Some of these gaps could potentially be filled now if donors and outside agencies were quietly approached in advance for support. END SUMMARY.

UNHCR Planning Assumptions

12. (C) UNHCR began contingency planning in earnest in the spring of 2006 for possible population movements after a decision on final status, although planning on how to handle population displacements had begun provisionally even earlier, after the March 2004 riots. UNHCR's Pristina latest plan (we have been allowed only to review the document, not carry away a copy, since UNHCR is worried it will leak to the Serbian media as did a previous document) is dated August 13, 2006 and presents three political scenarios that could emerge from the status decision: independence, independence with partition, and territorial autonomy under Serbian sovereignty. (Comment: The delineation of these scenarios is purely UNHCR's and does not appear to be tied to any particular UN or UNMIK analysis that might afford greater prescriptive ability and consequently more refined planning. The first two scenarios appear to us to differ little in terms of numbers of southern Serbs who might potentially exit their enclaves, though a "soft" partition could encourage more Serbs to remain in northern Kosovo versus travelling on to Serbia, and the third scenario is unlikely in the extreme. End comment.)

¶3. (C) Within the scope of these three scenarios, UNHCR additionally contends for planning purposes that:

- internationals are overstating potential problems north of the Ibar and understating them in Kosovo's southern ethnic Serb enclaves;
- the size and direction of population movements will depend on whether there is violence and the kinds of assurances given to minority populations by the Kosovo government and the international community;
- no matter which of the three scenarios occurs, there will be some population movements as minority areas consolidate, especially in any new majority Serb municipalities created by the final status document. UNHCR also believes that whatever the outcome, some Serbs will not leave at all and others could delay their ultimate departure. At the present time, UNHCR has staff monitoring all Serb enclaves to report trigger events like property listings and school enrollment figures to assess whether people are preparing to move. These reports are not indicating any potential movements at the present time.

¶3. (C) In the event that independence is the outcome of the final status process, UNHCR's planning assumptions encompass anywhere from 41,000 to 112,000 refugees or displaced persons. Of these, UNHCR calculates 17,000 could be displaced within Kosovo (either to enclaves in the south or the majority Serb areas north of the Ibar River) in a low displacement scenario and 31,000 within Kosovo in a high displacement situation. Previously UNHCR representatives had told us they estimated only 10,000 Kosovo Serbs would choose to leave Kosovo after final status. The reason for the recent rise in estimate is unclear, but it makes obvious the gaps UNHCR could face with a large population outflow (see

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para 6 below).

Contingency Planning Coordinated with Other Agencies, But Still Problematic

¶4. (C) According to UNHCR representatives in Pristina, every UNHCR office (Pristina, Belgrade, Skopje and Podgorica) that could be affected by possible population movements and displacement because of a decision on Kosovo's final status has undertaken contingency planning in coordination with relevant local organizations and agencies. In Kosovo, UNHCR has used a three-tiered approach to develop its contingency plan. In initial stages of planning, a limited number of agencies (UNMIK, ICRC, KFOR and the Danish Relief Council, UNHCR's long-standing logistics partner in Kosovo) formed an operational core team. Later, UNHCR expanded this group to include other key international NGOs (particularly UNHCR's lead partners throughout different areas of Kosovo -- Norwegian Church Aid in Mitrovica, International Catholic Migration Commission in Peja and Prizren, and Mercy Corps in Gjilan and Pristina). Lastly, the UNHCR brought in the broader community, most significantly Kosovar and Serbian government officials, to focus on a public information campaign and on preventing de-stabilization.

¶5. (C) Even with the seemingly coordinated effort, however, the multi-agency approach has had its difficulties. UNHCR Pristina representative Francesca Friz-Priguda (protect) told us that the various UN agencies involved often had different agendas; as an example, she claimed, UNDP was too focused on the effect of population outflows on its own returns projects and not enough on the emergency recovery aspects of a possible UN-led crisis response.

Pre-positioned Supplies for Large-Scale Movement Inadequate, Outside Support Will Be Needed

¶6. (C) Friz-Priguda said bluntly that UNHCR will be hard pressed to deal with any massive outflow from Kosovo because its programs in the Balkans are only 80 percent funded. She

added that collective centers UNHCR has identified in southern Serbia could accommodate only 3,000 persons and UNHCR would have to reopen those collective centers that have not been privatized or otherwise currently used for other purposes. UNHCR has stored a small amount of contingency stocks of non-food items like blankets, stoves, hygiene kits and mattresses in a warehouse outside of Pristina; however, depending on the scale of displacement these stocks would not be nearly enough. Food could also be a problem. UNHCR has only stored emergency food rations for 5,000 people for three days. It expects it could quickly expand its stocks to cover one month or involve the World Food Program (WFP), despite the fact that WFP is no longer operating in the region.

COMMENT

¶7. (C) UNHCR's own planning assumptions, recently raised to include the possibility of tens of thousands of IDPs, demonstrate that resources to deal with a large population outflow could quickly be exhausted. Early and swift response from donors and other international agencies might be required to avert a humanitarian crisis. In this respect, UNHCR appears to have done little to marshal support in advance, and seems -- unrealistically -- to be relying on the impetus of the moment to bring aid to the table should the worst happen.

¶8. (C) Nor is it apparent that there are long-term solutions to the very real problems posed by a population migration out of Kosovo. We see no special provision for the possibility that a significant number of southern Serbs might choose to remain in northern Kosovo, where the political climate might be more congenial to them but where the supply of housing is already strained to capacity. Embassy Belgrade can comment further, but upwards of 40,000 refugees or more streaming into Serbia would likely also find an inhospitable atmosphere

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and social welfare systems unable to cope with the additional burden.

¶9. (C) In the end, of course, much depends on the assumptions made about refugee outflow and the impact of an independence decision on Kosovo Serb calculations. We can hope for the best, but prudent planning demands that we deal more effectively with the potential for large-scale population movements, especially given the political implications of a major humanitarian event in the immediate post-status period. Department may wish to engage with UNHCR at a higher level on the potential for encouraging advance commitments by donors and other agencies, including WFP, should a crisis build. USOP will continue to work with UNHCR on the ground and help shape their planning assumptions in line with the evolving political dynamic. END COMMENT.

¶10. (SBU) U.S. Office Pristina does not clear this cable for release to U.N. Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari.
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